

Friday, May 16, 2014. The Coldwater *Daily Reporter*, page A4:

YOUR VIEWS

'Snow days' at libraries

To the Editor:

It was Saturday afternoon, between Good Friday and Easter.

The Branch District Library (BDL) in Coldwater was closed, as must have been all the branches, in Algansee, Bronson, Quincy, Sherwood and Union City.

The "closed" sign at the entrance was not a pleasant sight, given hard times for the BDL, with the ongoing decline in revenue.

I could not help but think of the dire consequences of a failure to pass the millage that will be on the August primary ballot. The BDL would continue to exist in some form, but how often would the many thousands of patrons who make use of the library be faced with "closed" signs?

Take Sherwood, for example.

According to Sherwood Director Gina Horn, total attendance there in 2013 was 3,796. Four hundred forty-six children attended 34 different programs and nearly 400 patrons checked out 6,029 items.

There is not a whole lot going on in Sherwood these days, so we should all be grateful that young, old and everyone in between have a library there.

Consider it a snapshot of what goes on all over the county.

I suppose there are many who do not care what goes on in Sherwood any more than they care what goes on in Algansee, Bronson, Coldwater, Quincy or Union City, and that is a shame. There are certainly some who do not even care what goes on in their own neighborhood.

But we are all connected, and what goes on anywhere in the county is connected to quality of life for all 42,000 in Branch County.

It was reported after

Easter that some Michigan school districts will have some leeway on the number of snow days they have to make up, following legislation signed by Gov. Rick Snyder.

But those who think learning is confined to schools have a lot to learn.

The BDL system is filled with opportunities for young and old to learn all year long, about whatever interests them. And it is also filled with so many opportunities for enjoyment and entertainment, with materials as well as programs. There is something at the free public library for everyone.

The millage on the August primary ballot is a pittance, weighed against all the library offers.

The Saturday mentioned above was a "snow day" for the library, one of the furlough days instituted by the BDL board in the face of vanishing revenue.

Vote "Yes" in the August primary, to prevent more "snow days" in the library system and help them restore services.

Roland Stoy, Coldwater

Thursday, May 22, 2014. The Coldwater *Daily Reporter*, page A4:

Keep them open

To the editor:

The library was open for business.

And what a business they did on Saturday, April 3.

This is being written following a letter to the editor regarding a stop there on the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter, when the library had a closed sign on the door. It was a furlough

day, as I learned later, but as I sat there and looked at the sign, I felt a dread of a failed millage and more "closed" signs, should the millage proposal fail in the August vote.

But on the third day of April, the library was alive with activity on all floors, and I am sure they were busy in Algonsee, Bronson, Quincy, Sherwood and Union City.

At Coldwater, the young and older were everywhere. In the Kids' Place, they were having a well-attended "Wonka Fest," in which children were able to create their own "Wonka Candy Land," and engage in other related activities along with their families.

The Wonka Fest, which came ahead of "Willie Wonka" taking the stage at the Tibbits Opera House beginning May 8, was one of many activities and programs the Branch District Library (BDL) provides for the people of the county all year.

This includes Quincy, where a Mike O'Connor wrote a letter to the editor printed on May 2. He spoke to a letter of mine that mentioned novelist, columnist and humanitarian Mitch Albom and libraries.

I must correct Mr. O'Connor publicly on at least one point: Mitch Albom is NOT a plagiarist, nor has his radio program been "suspended."

Mr. Albom does not need me to defend him, but I must say I do not at all understand the last paragraph of that letter: "To learn, if you are a Hemingway, stand in snow in sandals near four corners bell tower and listen, For Whom the Bells Toll."

To learn what? What "four corners bell tower" and why would anyone stand in sandals in snow there?

Never mind. But as long as we are on the subject of "For Whom the Bell (singular) Tolls," Hemingway took that from John Donne, from a portion of "Meditations XVII" that also says, "No man is an island."

No person is an island, and among the townships and municipalities of Branch County there are no islands. There are 21,000 people, young and older, that have library cards and if the quality of life is better for half of the population of Branch County, it is better for all of us.

I will not go into the nuts and bolts of the millage financial matter here; that is all at branchdistrictlibrary.org. But I will ask here that all, even the half of the county population without library cards, keep an open mind and support the millage.

Roland Stoy, Coldwater

Friday, May 23, 2014. The Coldwater *Daily Reporter*, page A1:

BRANCH DISTRICT LIBRARY-BRONSON BRANCH

Ghost hunters to hold convention Saturday

By Chris Worst

Twitter: @ChrisWorst_TDR

BRONSON — Branch County has quite a bit of paranormal activity according to Darius Barringer, founder of Southern Michigan Paranormals of Coldwater.

"I started in the paranormal because there were some very weird things going in my house," Barringer said.

She came to the conclusion that there was no one in the area to help her with these issues, so she called



the Southern Michigan Paranormals organization in Kalamazoo. With its help, she co-founded a group that eventually split into Southern Michigan Paranormals of Coldwater.

Barringer's local group

and the parent organization in Kalamazoo will travel to the Branch District Library-Bronson Branch on Saturday for "Paracon-One," an event intended to help ghost hunters network with locals in Branch County.

The goal is "just to bring in the public and let them meet real paranormal investigators," said Dan Holroyd of Kalamazoo, founder of Southern Michigan Paranormals. "We just want people to know who we are and what we do."

"It's not just what you see on TV," Holroyd added. "We put in a lot of time outside our families and professions."

Holroyd said that his organization has done investigations and held events throughout Michigan and into Indiana. Quite often the group raises money for charity.

"We just care about our communities," he said.

Historic preservation, according to Holroyd, is his group's most important mission.

"We talk a lot about history," he said.

His reasoning for setting up an event in Bronson, he said, was because of the historic nature of Bronson and the surrounding area.

Barringer also mentioned the importance of history in her local organization's paranormal research. Last Halloween, Southern Michigan Paranormals of Coldwater held an event at the Masonic Temple in

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CONVENTION

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Coldwater, with proceeds going to the Branch County Historical Society.

Susan Bates, another member of the group, was at an investigation held at the Masonic Temple. She said that her group recorded sounds of people playing pool even though nobody was there.

"That's what drives us," Bates said. "Getting little things like that."

Holroyd said there will be tables set up at the library on Saturday displaying the equipment his organization uses. He plans on making the experience an interactive one and encouraged the public to come ready with questions.

"We want people to get the right idea," Holroyd said.

The event will take place from Saturday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. in and (weather permitting) outside the Bronson Branch library. For more information, contact Lynnell Eash, branch manager, at 369-3786.

Tuesday, May 27, 2014. www.thedailyreporter.com

Sherwood Memorial Day Photo Gallery

Photo gallery for online only. Do not use in print.

Posted May. 27, 2014



A mad scientist demonstrates what happens when mentos is put in a coke bottle. The display was a promotion for the Branch District Library of Sherwood and Union Township's summer reading series. CHRIS WORST PHOTO

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FUNDING WOES

Library district in jeopardy

By Don Reid
dwreid@aol.com

COLDWATER — On the Aug. 4 ballot there will be a request from the Branch District Library to add half a mill for eight years for operating expenses.

Former library board member of Dorothy Cherry, who served in that capacity for 14 years, has visited



Cherry

many organizations to explain why the money is needed — along with warning county commissioners and Coldwater city council members that the funding issue could come back to haunt them.

"If the district library folds

then the duty devolves back to the county commission and the city council on how to provide public libraries in the county," she said.

The current district was set up in 1991 when a previous agreement between the city and county began to cause problems of who was fairly funding joint operations.

"Each thought the other should have been spending

more and doing more," Cherry said.

The new district was created under the constitution with .7 mills to operate libraries in Coldwater, Quincy, Union City Bronson, Sherwood and Algonsee Township. A portion of state's penal fines — traffic ticket fines — go to the libraries.

Cherry noted there as a very small amount of state

funding available.

"(The library district) has always been locally-funded and will always need to be locally-funded," she said.

Penal funds dropped off, as did tax millages during the economic downturn of 2008.

"It is not an exaggeration that services are in jeopardy," Cherry said.

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JEOPARDY

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Cherry told the lawmakers that the library boards had gone to every possible funding source.

"We have been digging holes for the last three years," she said. "We have borrowed money. We have spent reserves. We have frozen employee wages and benefits — then cut employee wages and benefits."

Library hours have also been adjusted.

"We have cut public hours from 9,200 to 7,100 a year," Cherry said. "We don't have the funds to keep doors open. We cut the book and materials budget by over 50 percent in each of the last two years."

The requested half mill would be solely used for operating expenses.

Cherry explained the library "is for people who cannot afford to go to bookstores and buy books or have their own private libraries. The public library supplies their needs."

The only option is a millage.

"If the library is continue to function the library needs about \$500,000 a year more to function to fill all the holes we have been digging,"

Cherry said.

Roland Stoy, who covered county government

and local library issues for the Daily Reporter before for many years before his January 2013 retirement, supported Cherry.

"I don't think the library

is asking for a lot," he said. "I want to impress on the people how important the millage is. There are over 21,000 card holders with 43,000 people in the county."

Stoy added, "You go (to the library) any day and that is a busy place. (People) are looking for books, are on the computers looking for jobs or getting help with resumes. The kids have a place to go. Look at Sherwood; they have a library."

The drop in penal fines started in 2010. They are up this year, but not much. In the first quarter fines to the library were \$84,000 — up only \$30,000 from the same period in 2013 — and not enough to meet needs.

Cherry warned legislators are looking at penal fines to fund the public defender system starting at the end of 2015.

"Branch County has a good consolidated library system," she said. "It's tech savvy. People are getting services with hundreds of thousands of items are in circulation. Hundreds of thousand computer uses — free wi-fi 24 hours a day, seven days a week in all six locations. But it can't operate on thin air."

Why should the county commission be concerned about the millage vote? Because if the district library doesn't have enough funds to continue to operate, the constitution guarantees a right of access to public libraries in Michigan.

If voters don't want the special millage and it fails, the county commission and City of Coldwater officials "are going to have to do a lot of heavy thinking on how you provide library service," Cherry warned.



Stoy

and local library issues for the Daily Reporter before for many years before his January 2013 retirement, supported Cherry.

"I don't think the library

drinks?

Yes!

What movie are we going to watch?

I don't know.

Hey, everyone ... let's get into the car and head to the Branch District Library! They have a wide selection of current movies with a few of the classics tossed in.

So now the question is, what movie do we pick? There are so many to choose from and they are free and we can check them out for one week. After much discussion we choose "Star Trek: Into Darkness."

We arrived home, prepared the popcorn and gathered around the TV to watch Captain James T. Kirk save the universe and enjoy an inexpensive night of family fun.

The movie for next week has been placed on hold from another branch in the Branch District Library and I will be able to pick that up at the branch that is closest to me. I can also return it there when I am finished with it.

Having access to the other five branches of the Branch District Library at the branch closest to me is pretty cool. We, the citizens of Branch County, are so blessed to have such a wonderful library available to us.

This, though, may not be as readily available to us or the great selection of movies may well be cut if the current economic condition continues. However, we have a chance to keep this good thing going.

On the Aug. 5, 2014 ballot there will be a millage request to add .5

— half a mill — onto the library millage to restore services that have already been cut. A "yes" vote will allow the citizens of Branch County to continue to have access to such a wonderful collection of movies and to enjoy many inexpensive family movie nights.

Please vote YES on Aug.

5.

— Jeffery A Hawkins,
Bronson

Libraries are a blessing

To the Editor:
Preparation for family movie night starts early.
Do we have popcorn?
Yes!
Do we have enough